

Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /031 W

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R 121116Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5503

C O N F I D E N T I A L LIBREVILLE 0722

EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY EASUM FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ETRN, PFOR, GB, US

SUBJ: PRESIDENT BONGO'S DESIRE TO PURCHASE DC-8 IN U.S.

REF: STATE 115411

1. APPRECIATE YOUR PERSONAL CABLE AND EFFORTS TO RESOLVE THIS THORNY ISSUE. HAVE SOMEHOW MANAGED TO HOLD OFF ANTICIPATED BONGO OUTBURST UP TO NOW, BUT PRESIDENT MADE CLEAR TO ME AT AIRPORT YESTERDAY UPON HIS DEPARTURE FOR MOGADISCIO THAT HE EXPECTED REPLY FROM USG BY THE TIME HE RETURNS. FORTUNATELY HE IS PLANNING TRIP TO PARIS AFTER OAU MEETING AND IS SCHEDULED TO REMAIN IN FRANCE JUNE 16 TO 20. DO NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT WE CAN COUNT ON BONGO REMAINING QUIET ON ISSUE IF WE DO NOT HAVE REPLY FOR HIM BY THEN.

2. ONE OF PRESIDENT BONGO'S COUNSELORS AT PRESIDENCY, WHO HAD TOLD ME THAT WE COULD EXPECT "EXPLOSION" ON JUNE 20 IF MATTER STILL UNRESOLVED, MENTIONED IN PASSING THAT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT AFFRETAIR MIGHT BE PLANNING TO ACQUIRE ANOTHER DC-8 BUT THAT "OF COURSE, THIS HAS NOTHING WHATEVER TO DO WITH DC-8 WHICH PRESIDENT BONGO ATTEMPTING TO ACQUIRE FROM SEABORD FOR HIS OWN PERSONAL USE."

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3. I HAVE NO OTHER INDICATION THAT AFFRETAIR THINKING

OF ACQUIRING ANOTHER DC-8 AND THERE MAY BE NOTHING TO IT. ON THE OTHER HAND, WHILE I HAVE, OF COURSE, NO KNOWLEDGE CONCERNING INFORMATION IN WASHINGTON WHICH IS HOLDING UP BONGO'S DC-8 PURCHASE, IT WOULD SEEM POSSIBLE THAT THERE MAY BE CONFUSION BETWEEN TWO DIFFERENT AIRCRAFTS. WHILE BONGO MAY WELL BE SEEKING TO PURCHASE AIRCRAFT FOR HIS OWN LEGITIMATE USE (PLUS OCCASIONAL UTA COMMERCIAL USE), AFFRETAIR MAY BE SIMULTANEOUSLY ATTEMPTING TO ACQUIRE ADDITIONAL DC-8 TOTALLY UNRELATED TO PLANE BONGO SEEKING TO ACQUIRE. IF SUCH SHOULD BE THE CASE, IT WOULD SEEM TO ME THAT SO LONG AS WE MAKE ABSOLUTELY SURE THAT USG IN NO WAY INVOLVED IN PERMITTING U.S. SALE OF ADDITIONAL DC-8 TO AFFRETAIR, THERE ARE NO LEGAL REASONS WHY WE COULD NOT PERMIT SALE OF DC-8 TO BONGO FOR LEGITIMATE USE.

4. WHAT WE WOULD BE DOING, AND IT SEEMS TO ME WE SHOULD BE ABLE AND WILLING TO DO IT, IS TO ISOLATE THE AFFRETAIR PROBLEM FROM THE REST OF OUR RELATIONS WITH GABON. IF THIS BE OUR AIR, WE SHOULD, OF COURSE, RESOLUTELY REFUSE TO SELL AIRCRAFT OR SPARES TO AFFRETAIR, BUT NOT SLIDE AUTOMATICALLY INTO FORBIDDING ALL OTHER AIRCRAFT SALES TO GABON. IF WE EMBARGOED SALES TO EVERY NATION WHICH HAD ONCE ABUSED OUR CONFIDENCE OR WERE COMMITTING WHAT WE VIEWED AS UNETHICAL ACTS, WE WOULD, I THINK, HAVE FEW TRADING PARTNERS.

5. OBVIOUSLY, IF WE HAVE FIRM INFORMATION THAT PLANE BONGO SEEKING TO PURCHASE FROM SEABORD IS INTENDED FOR TRAFFIC WITH RHODESIA, WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO REFUSE EXPORT LICENSE. AT THE SAME TIME, I WOULD HOPE THAT WE CAN VIEW BONGO'S CURRENT REQUEST FOR A PERSONAL DC-8 VERY MUCH ON ITS OWN MERITS, DISTINCT FROM RUMORED OR EVEN REAL EFFORTS BY AFFRETAIR TO AUGMENT ITS FLEET.

6. CONSIDERING VERY NEGATIVE IMPACT ON OUR RELATIONS WITH GOG WHICH A U.S. REFUSAL WILL HAVE, HOPE WE WILL BE ABLE TO SORT OUT HARD FACTS FOR QUESTIONABLE EVIDENCE IN TIME TO COME TO A CONCLUSION PRIOR TO JUNE 20.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: FOREIGN RELATIONS, AIRCRAFT SALES, DC-10, VISITS, PASSENGER TRANSPORTATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 JUN 1974
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: izenbei0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974LIBREV00722
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740151-0854
From: LIBREVILLE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19740653/aaaabtdo.tel
Line Count: 107
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: STATE 115411
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: izenbei0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 APR 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <30 APR 2002 by elyme>; APPROVED <20 FEB 2003 by izenbei0>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT BONGO'S DESIRE TO PURCHASE DC-8 IN U.S.
TAGS: ETRN, PFOR, GB, US, FR, (BONGO, ALBERT BERNARD)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005